

FEATURE – VILSACK TESTIFIES ON CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

INTRO: Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack appeared before the Senate Agriculture Committee on the importance of funding child nutrition programs. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:41)

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY TOM VILSACK TOLD THE U-S SENATE'S AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE THAT CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS MUST BE REAUTHORIZED TO COMBAT HUNGER, IMPROVE HEALTH AND IMPROVE THE PROGRAMS.

Tom Vilsack, Agriculture Secretary: The scale of these programs means that reforms can have a major impact on tens of millions of school children.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN SENATOR BLANCHE LINCOLN AGREED WITH VILSACK WHILE OUTLINING THREE PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVING THE PROGRAMS.

Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-AR: First we must take steps to ensure that all children eligible for federal child nutrition programs are actually receiving them. Second we must improve the nutritional quality of the meal benefits provided through our child nutrition programs. Third we must modernize and improve the integrity of child nutrition programs.

VILSACK ALSO RESPONDED TO QUESTIONS ABOUT FUTURE FUNDING OF ENHANCED CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS.

Sen. Richard Lugar, R-IN: By and large expansion of these programs is expensive. It carries some fiscal responsibility. I'm just curious as we reauthorize the programs, have you been able to work through the budget process to determine whether we can pay for them?

Vilsack: Senator I think it's important to focus when you're dealing with the issue of cost and affordability of what the cost of inaction and inactivity might be. If we fail to address this issue aggressively now we will clearly pay for it with significant increases in health care expenditures in the future.

U-S-D-A ADMINISTERS SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PROGRAMS ALONG WITH THE WOMEN INFANTS AND CHILDREN PROGRAM. IN WASHINGTON D-C FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE I'M BOB ELLISON